

## The Role of Local Business in Community Resilience to Natural Hazards

### Background

As part of a broader public policy focus on building resilience, 'communities' are being pushed to take on more responsibility for their ability to respond to emergencies, including natural hazards. In Scotland, the main mechanism for promoting community resilience in this way has been through encouraging local groups – mostly community councils but also dedicated resilience groups or flood groups – to develop localised resilience or emergency plans. In this approach, the resilience of communities is linked to the capacity of these groups, made up of individual volunteers, to effectively plan for emergencies and to put these plans into operation, liaising with those agencies that have a statutory role as emergency responders where appropriate.

The idea of local businesses as part of these communities, and as a potential source of support or resources to be mobilised in response to emergencies, is however somewhat under-developed. While the Scottish Government's guidance does encourage responders to consider businesses as one element of resilient communities, the practical role that businesses can play in emergencies is limited to the observation that: *"Local services such as shops and pubs can also act as a communication hub within communities, and in recent emergencies, people who run these businesses have acted as the point of contact between communities and*

*responders."*<sup>1</sup>

This research project, carried out by researchers at the University of Glasgow's Dumfries Campus and funded by the National Centre for Resilience, sought to explore the role that businesses play in community resilience planning and response, through a national survey of community groups and interviews with community representatives, businesses and local authority resilience officers.

### Local Resilience Planning

Official guidance from the Scottish Government, and support from Local Authorities, encourages community groups to develop resilience plans and registers of local volunteers and assets to be deployed in the event of an emergency situation. This research suggests that this practice of formal community resilience planning is still spreading in Scotland. Around a quarter (24%) of the 189 community groups responding to the survey already had community resilience or emergency response plan in place, and a further 14% were in the process of developing one. The vast majority of these groups had some sort of support from their local authority to help with this process, while some had also made use of the Scottish Government's guidance material or been supported by the Scottish Flood Forum.

Conversely, of those groups without a formal plan, 46% said that it was not something they had considered, despite the effort being put into promoting community resilience planning, and

1. Scottish Government (2013). *Building Community Resilience: Scottish Guidance on Community Resilience*, <https://www2.gov.scot/Publications/2013/04/2901/0>

33% put this down to not having sufficient time or resources. Only 14% said that they had decided it was not necessary.

The approach to community resilience planning varies between local authorities – in some regions there is an emphasis on encouraging the development of plans across all community council areas, while in others the existence of a formal plan is seen as less crucial. However, the creation of a local resilience plan is also dependent on the existence of an active community group (usually a community council) to take this forward. The existence of active community councils varies across Scotland, with evidence that they are less common in areas with high levels of multiple deprivation<sup>2</sup>.

### Businesses' Contribution to Emergency Responses

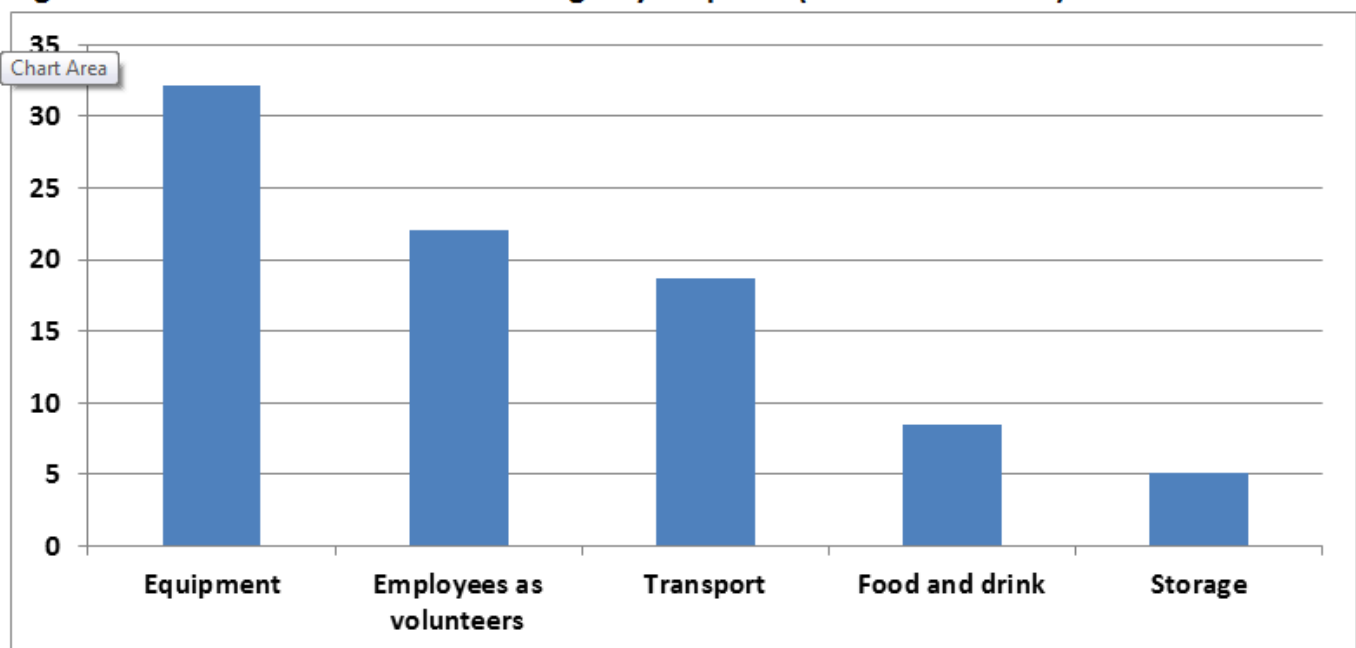
Local businesses had helped their communities to respond to natural hazards in a variety of ways. Of the 59 communities that had responded to some sort of emergency – either planned or unplanned – in the last two years, businesses had made some sort of contribution in 58% of places. The most common type of resource that they were able to supply (Figure 1) was machinery or equipment, including, for example, the use of heavy and specialised machinery to clear roads of fallen trees or snow,

or generators where there was an interruption to power supplies. However, businesses also provided a more varied range of contributions, including the deployment of employees as 'manpower' (for example in moving sandbags), helping volunteers to reach remote or vulnerable residents, and supplying hot food for volunteers or other affected members of the community.

Beyond this, there is also evidence of ways in which businesses contribute to raising the capacity and resilience of communities outside the immediate period of the emergency response itself. For example, some businesses provide storage on their premises for material belonging to their local resilience group, or contribute financially to local fundraising initiatives that allow groups to purchase equipment or resources.

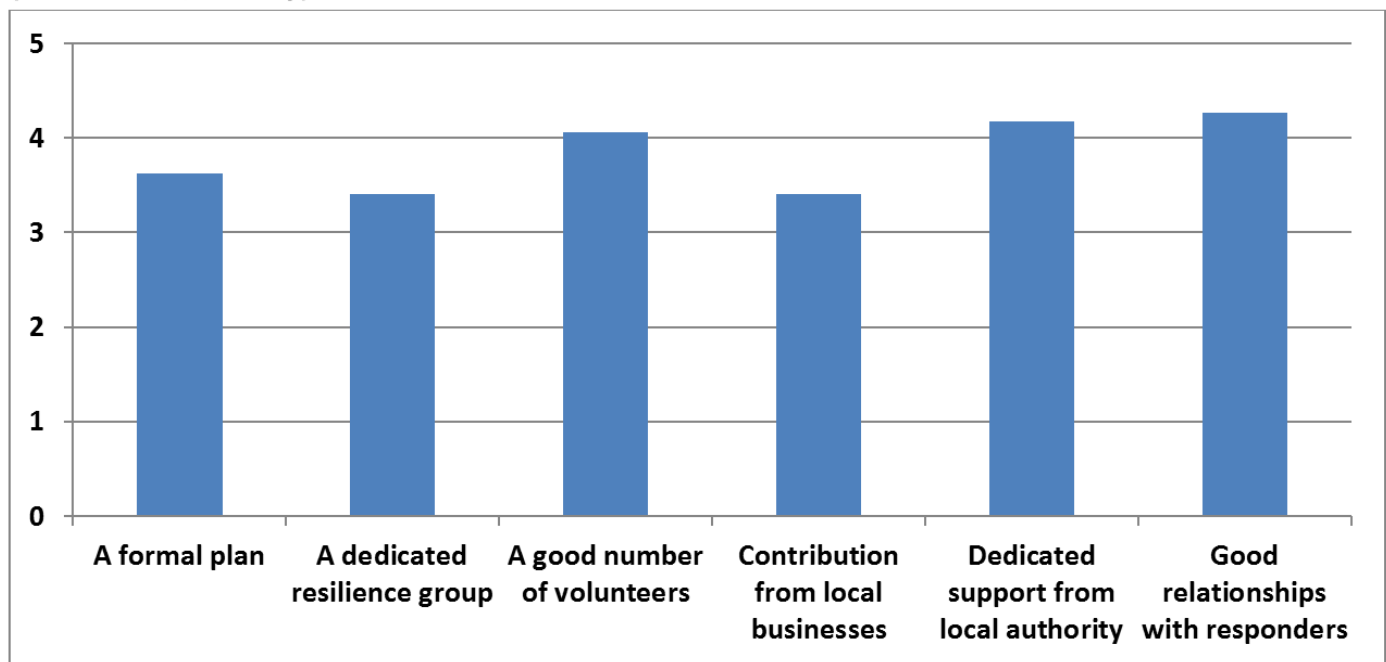
Despite these contributions, support from local business is ranked relatively lowly by community representatives in terms its importance to community resilience (Figure 2). This is perhaps influenced by the fact that most survey respondents had not experienced or planned for an emergency situation, and were therefore likely to be unaware of the potential support that businesses could provide. It may also reflect the very limited attention that this receives in any of the official guidance to community groups on developing resilience.

**Figure 1: Business Contributions to Emergency Response (% of Communities)**



2. Scottish Government (2013) *Survey of Local Authority Community Councils*, <https://www2.gov.scot/resource/0044/00440438.pdf>

**Figure 2: Perceived importance of different factors in community resilience planning and response (1=Not at all; 5=Very)**



### Motivation and Barriers to Business Involvement

Where businesses were engaged with community resilience activity, this tends to be attributed to a sense of community 'spirit' or responsibility, often stimulated by previous shared experiences of natural hazards. In some cases there is also a degree of self-interest involved – where, for example, businesses help to clear blocked roads that inconvenience them as well as other members of the community.

There are, however, a number of factors that are identified as inhibiting the contribution of businesses to the resilience of their communities in terms of emergency response:

- Questions around insurance, liability and risk are of some concern to both community groups and businesses. This has been identified as an issue in previous research around community resilience plans in Scotland<sup>3</sup>. Community council members and volunteers are covered by insurance policies arranged by local authorities, and there have been efforts to clarify the terms of these. There remain, however, concerns that businesses voluntarily undertaking activities on behalf of the community could be at risk either incurring financial losses through damaging their own equipment or from being liable for

accidents involving other people and property.

- Many community councils and groups appear unlikely to consider the potential role that local businesses can play in planning and responding to emergencies or natural hazards. In addition, there is a perception amongst some community groups in very rural areas that there are no or very few businesses in their areas – 'only farms' that are thought of as 'not really businesses'.
- The 'asset register' system used by community resilience groups was felt to be primarily designed as a register of individual local volunteers, rather than for identifying the distinctive contribution that could be made by local businesses and their assets.
- There is resistance on the part of some businesses to the idea that they should have any role in this type of community resilience response, particularly where they see activities such as clearing roads as being the responsibility of local authorities or other responders.
- Engagement of businesses in community-level resilience planning appears to be almost exclusively the domain of very small and locally-owned firms. Although there is some anecdotal evidence of the local units of larger firms – such

3. Lyon C and Fazey I (2015) *Learning Lessons from Developing Community Resilience Plans in Scotland*, Centre for Environmental Change and Human Resilience, <https://discovery.dundee.ac.uk/en/publications/learning-lessons-from-developing-community-resilience-plans-in-sc>

as supermarket or pub chains – providing ad hoc support in the event of emergencies, where there is not at least some degree of local autonomy firms appear unlikely to be approached by or engage with groups like community councils. These larger companies are more likely to have direct relationships with statutory responders.

### **Moving Forward: Linking Local Business with Community Resilience**

The relatively benign winter of 2018/19, after the more widespread incidence of storms, flooding and heavy snow in recent years, has perhaps reduced the profile of resilience activity. Nevertheless, the current approach to developing community resilience through promoting local planning by voluntary groups is now well established in many parts of Scotland. These findings highlight the potential contribution that local businesses can make to communities' capacity to respond to emergencies, and suggest a number of practical steps that could be taken to facilitate this:

- In practical terms, there is demand for clear advice for community groups, potential volunteers and businesses engaging in community resilience activity about what would and would not be covered by existing insurance policies. Local authorities have already made attempts to clarify their specific terms and conditions, and to communicate these to community councils – there is evidence however that this remains a concern and a potential barrier.
- The resources produced by the Scottish

Government and local authorities – such as guidance and templates for compiling community resilience plans and asset registers to be activated in event of an emergency – could do more to prompt community groups to consider what assets and resources businesses in their community might be able to contribute. This might include, for example, a dedicated section in communities' asset registers identifying businesses in their area.

- If voluntary groups – and predominantly community councils – are to be the main mechanism for developing local community resilience, they are likely to require additional support if they are to effectively include local businesses in this process. Community councillors have already identified public participation and engagement as the biggest areas where they need training<sup>4</sup>, and there are likely to be additional challenges in engaging with businesses, given that this has not historically been one of their key roles. In particular they would need help in reaching larger businesses, local branches owned elsewhere and others that are outside their existing informal networks. Local authorities already provide support to community councillors in a variety of ways – in some areas there is a dedicated liaison officer, while others work on a ward or locality basis. There may be scope here to build more local connections with other local authority departments carrying out business engagement, chambers of commerce, or enterprise agencies with a view to drawing more firms into community resilience planning.

4. Paterson A, Nelis P and Escobar O (2019) *Strengthening Community Councils: Exploring how community councils can contribute to democratic renewal*, <http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/strengthening-community-councils-and-democratic-renewal-in-scotland/>

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